

Allen Brewer – Notes on Bitter Creek

*Recorded by Kathi Irving
Date: 28 May 2003
Tape #341 – Folder #1666*

After leaving Hill Creek and Vernal, C.P. Hill moved to Rangely and built an Indian Trading Post. He also built the first school house and sent back east for a teacher, whom he later married. When his two sons were old enough for school he had moved his cattle and established a winter ranch at the head of Park Canyon where the grass was better and winters milder than Rangely. He established his summer range near the head of Bitter Creek and about 10 miles from Baxter Pass in Colorado. He called it "Cripple Cowboy".

This winter country in Park Canyon extended all the way to Bitter Creek where they mixed with the Brewers Cattle in Asphalt Wash country.

Don Hills' brother was gassed in World War I and is believed to the cause of his death in the late 20's or early 30's.

Jim McPherson, Sr. was an excellent blacksmith and he hand made the biggest steel beam trap you ever saw and you would hardly know it was handmade. He carried in all his ranch machinery and all, including a piano, on horses and mules, excepting a trip or two he got up Green River on the ice. The piano did come in on horseback from Green River city, 35 miles to Florence Canyon.

Frank Brewer did not buy the Charles Hill place on Hill Creek. I don't know who did, but I doubt if Hill owned any land. Hill was among the first settlers in Vernal, or what it was called and I think he just owned cows and rock houses. He moved to Rangely before long and is known as the founder of Rangely.

C.P. Hill may have filed and relinquished a parcel of land on Hill Creek but the family all proved up on homesteads and owned a lot of land in Park Canyon and head of Bitter Creek – all in Colorado.

Pete Nelson owned three 40's of script land between Zane Canyon and Pete Canyon about three miles below the Smith holdings and on the upper end of this land was a bad alkali spread which had gone dry these last years. The Brewers bought this Nelson ground later on. South Canyon is a fork of Sweetwater when Frank Brewer built a small cabin in 1906 or 1907 and filed a homestead at the mouth of south Bitter Creek with an addition of 120 acres in South Canyon. Brewer soon moved his cows between PR Spring and the head of Sweetwater and wintered them on the desert south ridge until 1918 when he sold his winter range to Claude Taylor. Taylor bought Brewers relinquishment so they could file their own land and Brewer kept his land in South

Canyon in 1916. Brewer moved his family of six into a beautiful little cabin of two 16 x 16 rooms with screened-in porches; one on each side.

The Sweetwater ranch was homesteaded by Jake Stanford. He was a brother-in-law of the Turners. He married a sister, Ethel. Jake sold out to Johnny Mock in 1918 and Johnny Mock sold out to Frank A. and F. Allen Brewer in 1942.\

Frank Brewer bought the Balanced Rock ranch from Henry Lee in 1918 and W.C. Bill Haven filed the first homestead in Chipeta Canyon. Hill was a brother-in-law of Frank Brewers'. Bill lost most of his cattle the hard winter of 1919 and 1920. Bill turned the last of his cattle back to Bart Owens of Douglas Creek and went to work for the American Gilsonite Company, where he spent many years. Bill Havens finally sold his house and improvements, water filing, etc., to Allan Brewer for the money to pay the remaining debt to Bart Owens of the lazy 'T'.

Claude Taylor had his summer cabin in a side canyon that emptied into Chipeta Canyon at the Chipeta ranch. John Canyon was named for John Everett who had only a few cows and wintered on the desert south side.

Lyla Bennion, daughter of Ruby and Dez Nelson, tells the story of life on a homestead, which I am sure, is true. Frank Brewer bought the land and he told me it was three forties of script along the creek in 楊柳強強 in order to take in more of the creek bottom land and I might of known of one of the pigs that was lost in the flood. The first time I was there in 1918 there was a little black pig. There was about two or three acres of alfalfa and some swamp land and natural meadow above the house. A couple of small wire corrals above the east rim of Nelson Canyon near the house build up against a larger rock in the middle of the Canyon. A hand made table and a couple chairs and a walking plow in the house and every time I went riding by I saw a black pig until one day I saw that same pig up at Smith's with Smith's pigs. Years later I saw the house with just the roof sticking up; a huge flood had filled it completely.

John Purdy lived on Sweetwater below the Jake Stanford place sometime before Frank Brewer bought the Balanced Rock ranch in 1918. John Purdy and his wife, Grace of Rangely, had two sons. Jim the eldest and Dan the younger brother of Jim died at an early age of 19 or 20. Purdy's had a summer cabin in Willow Canyon a few miles northeast of PR and winter quarters joining the Stanford place on Sweetwater in the mouth of Trap Canyon.

The King brothers, Bill and Tom, had homesteads in Tent Canyon and Rat Hole and built wells and put in a pump way down in east Asphalt Wash. Tom King had 80 acres in what was called Reservoir Draw, a fork of Asphalt Wash; he sold that property and a house in Rainbow and his property in Tent Canyon to Alvin F. Preston. Preston moved the house in Rainbow to the place in Reservoir Draw and lived there by himself and got to calling himself the 'Lone Wolf' until folks got to calling the place "Wolf Den". Charles Hill had built a reservoir there years before that had been all filled up with flood water and was no longer useable, but because of this reservoir, the canyon got the

name of Reservoir Draw. The original Wolf Den was in a canyon several miles southeast of a fork of Burnt Timber and I think it has been completely forgotten.

Johnny Mock was located at the mouth of Tom Patterson Canyon on Sweetwater about seven miles from South Canyon. Dick Schneidervin had a place in a swamp of alkali at the mouth of Sweetwater on Bitter Creek. Dick wintered his cows there and summered on White River.

Boyd Turner had property in Cottonwood Canyon where is empties out on the Cisco desert where he wintered cattle.

Shorty Connell homesteaded some land between two Indian allotments on Sweetwater at the mouth of Black Horse Canyon. Shorty had some cattle but he made his living mostly by trapping Bob Cats and Coyotes. He went into the town of Dragon one day with a couple pack horses for supplies and John Purdy came by and noticed hawks were killing Shorty's chickens. So Purdy went into the house and picked up an old coat and made up a scare crow. When Shorty came back he saw the coat hanging there in the yard – he stuck his hand in the pocket and pulled out a good roll of his money.

Shorty sold out to Dan and Jim Purdy and spent the rest of his life in California.

The only wagon road into the Standford ranch was blasted out and completed by Jake Standford and John Purdy in 1916.

After Dan Purdy died the Purdy's sort of lost interest. Mrs. Purdy took sick and had to be taken away.

Mrs. Frank Brewer died in the fall of 1921, leaving five little lazy kids to sort of grow up wild like Pete Nelson's little pig.

Cark Squire told me the machinery hauled into Meadow Creek came up Agency Draw and down Dry Gulch and up Willow Creek to Meadow Creek. Carl showed me where the wagon and rake and mower were let down over rim rocks on ropes and I found an old brake block miles and miles from any wagon road. The wagon came into Dry Gulch just east of Flat Rock Spring.

Dad May was a good carpenter and cabinet maker and later on, working for Tom Larsen, he made a good roll top desk which to me was about as much a novelty in a house in Meadow Creek as a piano in Florence Canyon.

Years later Maven Broome and boys made a road up Bull Canyon and across Winter Ridge and down a side canyon into Meadow Creek ranch.

During the drought in 1934 the Bitter Creek ranchers drove a herd of 80 head of Condon cattle to Dragon when cowboys held them in a bend in Evacuation Creek and

government men shot them. Then Russell, Dan and I decided we would skin them. So we skinned them cows in about three or four days and the town folks decided they were a little too close to town and would have to be burned, so we took a team of horses and dragged them all up under the high wash bank and used dynamite to cave the wash bank down on them.

I don't understand when Venn Muse lived. I believe he was on Meadow Creek about then, but I was in the Aleutian Island on Uncle Sam's payroll.

In 1916 Frank Brewer bought a house in Fruita, Colorado, when my older sister, Ethel, went to school, 4th grade. I entered my first year in school and dad tended his cows on his place on south Bitter Creek. We spent the winters – 16, 17 & 18, in Fruita. Then in the spring of 1919 they put us on the little Uintah and brought us to Dragon where a hired hand met us with a team and wagon and took us to our new ranch at Balanced Rock.

That fall, 1919, there came a terrible storm at Thanksgiving time that caught Frank Brewer and Johnny Mock in San Aroya Canyon with a late beef drive and they had beef cattle snowed in all the way from San Aroya to West Water, a distance of maybe five miles. They made their headquarters at the West Water Ranch while, I don't know how long, assembling the cattle drive. Anyway, they had good tracking with steers dragging their bellies in the snow. Mock and Brewer didn't get back until nearly Christmas and cows snowed in all over Bitter Creek and Sweetwater. Cattlemen all over the country went broke in the winter 1919-1920 and the Brewer children had no school that year.

The following winter we had the log cabin W.C. Havens had made for his new bride in 1919-20 when most of his cattle had died. Uncle Bill Havens was my mother's brother and his cabin had become our school house and a fine young lady by the name of Pearl Schaffer was the first teacher. Our youngest brother was too young for school so there were only four of us for that season and maybe the next. Then Dick started in the first grade and the oldest sister went to Saratoga, Wyoming. Ethel finished the 8th grade with her cousin, young Mable Mowry and dad's sister, Ethel's aunt, Mable Mowry.

Alfred Smith, the only other child, was too young for school and when he was old enough for school he stayed with his mother's sisters in Vernal.

My grandmother Pullum, who was my mother's mother and the mother of Bill Havens, kept my sister Frances and we three boys, Dick, Jack and Allan, in school in Dragon one winter and the next winter Frances was sent to live with dad's folks, her grandma and grandpa Brewer in Santa Monica, California, where Frances finished high school.

We Brewer boys and a boy my age, Arthur "Casey" Gunther, from Whiskey Creek above Dragon, batched in the same house we had the year before and Casey and I attended the 8th grade until the grass got green in the spring.

After shipping was done the next year I went to Santa Monica and spent several months in Lincoln Junior High school. I know who discovered America and who sailed around the world in 1419 and I figured if that was all I could learn in ten years, I'd just as well quit. I went home and broke out ten head of broncos. I learned quite a lot from them horses.

Vern Muse was on the Leach place, on Willow Creek, not on Main Canyon.

Dick Tomlinson of Mack, Colorado and his son, Jim, had Main Canyon after Rube and Russell Squire and old Walt Russell's uncle.

There is a cliff dwelling visible from the bottom of Florence Canyon in a cave high on a perpendicular rim rock near the top of the canyon wall. I have forgotten the name of the man who told me he had flown over there and could see a woven basket in the cave.

Main Canyon heads very near PR. Then just over the hill from PR Spring goes down through what used to be called the summer camp homesteaded by Turners and sold to Rube and Walt Squire, then sold to Dick Tomlinson and now owned by DeLambert and runs into Willow Creek, just below the Roy Hatch homestead. Now days a pretty good road goes down Pine Springs, up through DeLambert and down Hay Canyon, on down to West Water to the state line and on to Grand Junction and Moab. Perhaps you have been down it; I was there when it was a very dangerous road. Tom Larsen's oldest boy was killed on that hill when Tom Larsen owned Meadow Creek Ranch.